A'jha helps Skylights reach new heights
Northern’s 6-5 center has brought more than a dominant post game to MSU-N
By George Ferguson
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In football, they say speed kills. In basketball size kills.

And as the Montana State University-Northern Skylights get closer to their first NAIA national women’s tournament game in eight years, they have a size advantage unlike most teams in the field.

Northern, led by head coach Chris Mouat has had some very good teams in recent years, but not since the days of center Stacie Barker have the Skylights had a dominating post presence, a presence that makes opposing teams quake with fear and keeps opposing coaches up at night.

The Skylights hadn’t had that kind of presence in a while, but when 6-5 center A’Jha Edwards decided to continue her playing career in Havre, everything changed.

Edwards, who came to Northern from Pima Community College in Arizona, has revolutionized the already talented Skylights in ways other teams only dream of. In her first season at MSU-N Edwards averaged 13 points and 11 rebounds, while totaling 31 blocked shots on the defensive end. She also shot better than 55 percent from the field and tallied 16 double-doubles this season.

But Edwards has done much more than just pile up numbers for the Skylights. On her way to earning Frontier Conference Newcomer of the Year honors, Edwards has also brought an intense, but lovable presence to a tight-knit Skylight team, and her size and skill set has also opened up things for everyone around her. Edwards is such a focal point for opposing defenses, that there is no way for those defenses to account for all of the other talent the Skylights have.

And all of those things have added up to a dream season for Northern, a season that will continue Wednesday with a NAIA first-round game against Columbia College.

“We’ve never had that type of post presence since I’ve been here,” junior guard Taylor Cummings said. “She’s changed everything for us. She is dominant, she can do everything on the low block, and teams have to focus on her. So that has opened things up for all of our good guards we have. As a point guard, I love having her presence on the floor. She’s changed our team.

“The biggest thing is, she’s bought into our program,” Mouat added. “She’s bought into our team, our community and everything we’re about. She’s been warmly welcomed by this community and I think that means a lot to her. You can try and sell a kid on all those things that are great about what we have going here at Northern and in this community, but until they actually get here and experience it, they don’t really know. Well, A’Jha’s experienced all of that now and I think she’s really found a home here with us.”
Indeed. Edwards has found a home, but not just on the basketball court. She’s quickly become part of the Skylight family, and that’s made a world of difference this season. And while at times, the adjustments were hard, especially the climate, Edwards now looks like she’s right at home.

“A’Jha is just such a good person,” said fellow newcomer Megan Feldman. “She’s such a sweet and nice person. She’s become a great friend.”

“She’s amazing,” said junior Rachelle Bennett. “She’s a great player and a great person.

“I think the winter was really hard for her,” Bennett added, laughing. “She did not like it all. I’m pretty sure she’s really glad it’s finally spring. But A’Jha has been great on and off the court. She’s a great teammate and a great player.”

The adjustments to playing and living in Havre have been hard, but after nearly a full season with the Skylights, including helping them get to the national tournament, Edwards wouldn’t change a thing. And neither would her Skylight family.

“She’s a huge factor on our team,” said sophomore Kacie McKeon. “She’s a great player. She has tremendous hands, and she’s pretty much unstoppable down low. And she’s a great friend and teammate. She’s funny and very positive all the time.

“There have been some bumps along the way for her,” Mouat said. “But she’s done a tremendous job of adjusting. She’s been phenomenal in becoming a very important part of this team. She’s positive, she picks people up and, wow, she’s taken her game to a very high level. Her progress through the course of this year has been amazing, and it’s been really fun to watch.”

“This year has been great,” Edwards said. “I really love this team. I love these girls. We are so close, and we are all great friends. That makes it so much fun to be a part of. When you have such a close group like we are, it makes basketball even more fun than it already is.”

Follow the Skylights with the Havre Daily News

All week, and right through Wednesday’s game in Kentucky, the HDN will have in-depth coverage of the Skylights’ trip to the national tournament. Look for features and a full game preview in Wednesday's HDN as well as complete game coverage on Thursday.